**Pros and Cons of Online Learning**

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| **Pros** | **Cons** | **Concerns and Possibilities** |
| Students write a lot; practically all of their communication is written, and they can be “forced” to participate and engage in interactive activities. | Written communication is inefficient compared to spoken communication. | I worry that this level of written engagement is not happening in all online classes, where the student tasks are automated and the specific feedback is paltry. |
| The technology keeps getting better and the number of open source materials available on the web keep getting better. | Teaching an online class is more work and less personally rewarding to the instructor. Online teaching and learning can easily be boring for both students and instructors. Everyone misses the stimulation of real face-to-face interaction. | Experimenting with new technologies can keep things exciting and fun, and using live chat and very active discussion boards can help keep the instructor engaged. |
| Online classes open up opportunities for “non-traditional” students who are working (particularly shift work), parenting, caretaking, etc. | Online classes have high attrition rates and require discipline on the part of both the students and the instructors. | Regular assignments and reasons to check into the class are absolute musts. Active and project based assignments, not just objective tests, are where the real learning is. |
| Online classes can cultivate independent and active learning by putting the onus of finding and analyzing material on the student. | The more inexperienced and vulnerable the student, the less successful that s/he is likely to be online. | Some administrators are pushing for remediation online; this seems like a terrible idea. Online learning for more experienced students can be really exciting and foster independence from their instructors. I find that Philosophy majors do pretty well online because they are already interested in the material. |
| Done right, online teaching can be a good way to mentor students in meaningful projects, since it is more project-based rather than discussion-based. | Administrators sometimes wrongly think that “online course” means that the demand should determine the cap. | The drive to dismantle public education could ruin what’s good about online teaching and make it into corporately packaged, low quality, banking system bits of information. |
| The lecture and testing model kind of stinks, and online teaching if done well encourages us to get away from that old and stale mode of teaching. | Online education can degenerate into the “faculty member as information delivery system” as much as in class lectures do. | There is a culture of distaste for traditional teaching and learning and the hope that online courses and MOOCs can revolutionize education. Teaching and learning are basically the same everywhere and some of the rush to online fails to take into account the importance of already prepared students. |

In terms of faculty rights, three principles must be categorically held up by Academic Senates, faculty governance bodies, and needs to be encoded in CBAs:

1. Faculty have the absolute ownership of their online course content.
2. Faculty within the discipline should be able to say what courses and programs (if any) are suitable for online or hybrid instruction and what the suitable workload/ course cap should be.
3. No faculty member should be coerced to teach online against her will. Teaching online requires at least a bit of enthusiasm for it, and forcing folks to do it is a recipe for disaster.

My sense is that we are about to the reach the peak of demand for online instruction. There’s more than enough out there to satisfy demand, and on my campus, I think that genuine student enthusiasm for online instruction is starting to wane. Students realize that 1) online classes are hard work; the credit that the get for showing up and participating in class in replaced by more labor-intensive writing, and 2) engaged students (which is most of them) want the face-to-face experience of class and the relationship with an instructor and peers. Also, administrators are getting the hint that it’s not a cure for enrollment or budget woes. In this sense, courses are courses and cost about the same through either mode of delivery (unless you hire unqualified instructors, but that’s another story).

The efficacy of online should be based on evidence and research, but often it’s just advanced by administrators (and Governors apperantly) as a way to save money and attract students. The best meta-study of online teaching and learning is the US Department of Education’s “Evaluation of Evidence Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies”

<http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>

This study ultimately claims that hybrid models work the best, probably because they can take advantage of the pros of each method. However, hybrid formats also runs the danger of cutting each method in half, and also embedding both sets of cons into the delivery system as well. Though moves to online should be evidence-based decisions, the vast majority of research on online education is conducted by true believers in the mode of instruction. So one avenue of inquiry for CFHE could be to do some more independent research on the efficacy of online instruction.

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